

MUJERISTAS
COLLECTIVE
ISSUE #3

- Diana Ortiz



SOY
MUJERISTA

ISSUE III

SOY MUJERISTA

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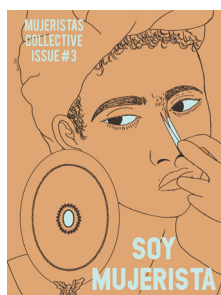
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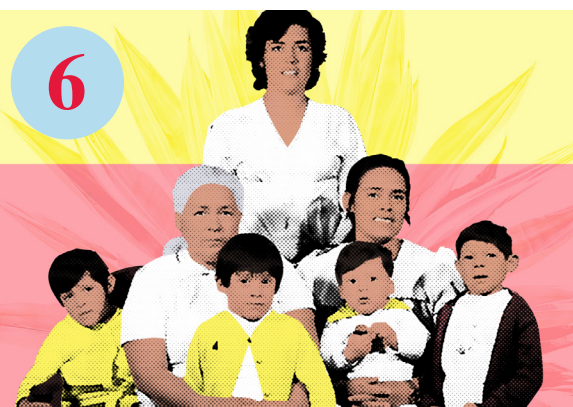
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Send your work to info@mujeristascollective.com

Mujeristas Collective is a publication for the voices of mujeres.



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National Catholic Reporter, Pam Bauer, 1980

Dear Mujerista,

Mujeristas Collective (MC) was born two years ago at St. John's University in Queens, New York. MC is an educational and creative platform for the voices of mujeres. Our goal is to document and present a diverse collection of historical stories and contemporary artwork from Latinas in a global perspective.

The founding of this group was inspired by **Ada María Isasi-Díaz** (1943-2012), Cuban activist-theologian, founded Mujerista Theology as liberation praxis and platform for the voices of grassroot Latinas. Her key elements of mujerista anthropology are three Spanish phrases that express the central experiences of a Latina in the U.S.:

La lucha, Permítanme hablar, and La comunidad/la familia.

Soy Mujerista features twenty-five Latina artists and writers across the United States, defining and constructing mujerismo on our own terms. Individually and collectively, we are illustrating and narrating what it means to be a Mujerista. As an exploration and elaboration to Isasi-Díaz's ideology, we present to you our three elements:

Familia, Patria and Mujerista.

Mil gracias,

Stephanie Aliaga & Team

PART I

FAMILIA

“It is in *la familia* that we can claim a historical role within space and time... by making viable future generations and by influencing them.”

– Ada María Isasi-Díaz

RAÍCES GARCÍA

DIGITAL COLLAGE WORK OF FAMILY PORTRAITS

VICTORIA GARCIA



ABUELITA
CIRCA 1952



FAMILIA GARCIA ALVAREZ
CIRCA 1979

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
TÍA MARICELA, TÍA CHUYA,
TÍA MÓNICA, TÍO POLÍN

BEHIND: TÍA ALMA, MI PAPÁ,
TÍO ARMANDO



FAMILIA ALVAREZ
CIRCA 1976

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
TÍA MARICELA, BISABUELA
SIMONITA, TÍA CHUY, TÍA
CHUYA, ABUELITA, TÍO
ARMANDO, TÍO POLÍN





TO MY MOTHER

16MM/VIDEO, SOUND

14:00 (2018)

MARIANA SÁNCHEZ BUENO

To My Mother is a film project that tells the fragmented story of a missing person through the already broken memories of those who recall the uncertain specificities of disappearance. In 1986, forced disappearances weren't unusual in Colombia. Some were product of the guerrillas, some of the paramilitary, some the military, and some of them simply a consequence of an unapologetically violent situation that left no room for suspicion. In the decades in which violence became the norm, many disappearances were left unanswered and unquestioned. In June of 2017 I set out on the journey of uncovering the story that has haunted my family since 1986, when my grandfather went missing. As I began to look for traces of my grandfather's story in the landscape, in the city's architecture and in my family's words, I realized that I naively believed I could be the one to resolve the past.

To My Mother then becomes about a Monday, a Tuesday, a Saturday, in March, or January, of 1986, or 2017. The story becomes about the discrepancies in the words being used, and the discrepancies between fact, fiction, past, and present. It is told

once by my grandmother, twice by my mother, three times by my aunt, and a fourth time by me. The carcass of the story remains untouched, while the ghosts that haunt it shift in the details of the way we recount what we choose to remember. The words and gestures change according to the memories the women in my family hold not only of my grandfather's presence, but also of the physical space he no longer occupies. The attention given to the mundane facts and to details is proof of how one might reli(e)ve over and over again a moment in the collective memory of a family and of a nation.

In the closing voice over, my aunt states: "When someone goes missing and you can't bury them, you look for them anywhere." *To My Mother* uses the scanning of 16mm film, letters and photographs, to build a family archive of memorabilia, images and voices. An archive within which exists the unseen presence of my grandfather, and the seen presence of those of us who reflect him in our image. This film plays the role of reparation and recreation of an untold story, a fragmented memory, a broken landscape and of a missing body.

TODO CAMBIA

GABRIELA HNIZDO



Upon hearing the term *Mujerista*, I immediately come to think of the many mujeres and ancestors that have come before and continue to guide me through my own healing and journey. *Todo Cambia* is a reflection of changes life brings as the seasons.





UN ARCO IRIS DE MUJER
DENISSE JULIANA JIMENEZ CHACON
OIL ON CANVAS
2017

Un Arco Iris de Mujer

Denisse Juliana Jimenez Chacon

She carefully puts on her vibrant, bold red lipstick. She then takes the lipstick and puts three dots on each of her cheeks. One. Two. Three. Then she proceeds to vigorously rub the bright, fiery red tint onto the contours of her strong cheekbones. She wears a high-waisted, long, black skirt with white daisies, and an embroidered black V-neck blouse with a delicate string of pearls draped carefully along her collarbone. She gently brushes her short black hair to the side. She's ready.

Rosa María Chacón Cárdenas. *Mi Mami Rosita*. She was a daughter of twelve, mother of three, and a grandmother to four. Although, she only met two. She was known around el barrio for her nurturing nature and kindness. She cooked some of the best *tamales*, *arepas*, *pasteles de yuca*, y *envueltos*. She never turned down help on anybody, even when she barely could. Yet, she never asked for any help for herself either.

As a woman, she was enigmatic. Her disposition always showed the woman she was expected to be: a strong, resilient, composed lady. Yet, Rosa was a different woman behind the blue barred door separating the outside world, from our own little world. In my little world, she was mi abuelita who made the best arepas in the world. In her world, unfortunately, I'm not so sure.

I could not tell you what being a *hija* meant for her. I could not tell you what being a *mamá* meant to her. I could not tell you what being a *abuela* meant to her. I could not tell you what being a *mujer* meant for her.

She did what she had to, to survive. She persisted through a misogynistic culture, in which I'm afraid she fell prey to. She endured physical and mental abuse from her husband, Rafael, for many years to

then raise her three small children on her own. She survived because that was what was expected of her. That was her only choice. She survived as most humans do. Until she couldn't.

"Me duele como cuando Rafael me pegaba"

As I remember her last days on Earth, these were the words that stuck with me for the longest. It wasn't until this moment that I realized she had had a journey of pain, love, survival, and death. As a young woman now, I often think of what my own tomorrow will bring. I find myself questioning what defining moments will outline my journey. In the end, I'd like to believe that Mami Rosita had these same questions.

What pain had made her stronger?
What love had made her caring?
What obstacles helped her survive?

And like many other resilient women, she left without a goodbye.

There's something pure and fascinating about it all. Have you ever felt someone so strongly in your blood? They are the little voice in your head. The gentle push when you need it most. They are the life source of the generations to come. Your generations to come...

I may not know Mami Rosita well outside of my twelve-year-old memories. But something in my blood tells me, she is here. And she never left. Because she is remembered by 3 children and four grandchildren. She survived, and that is the greatest lesson I have ever learned from *Mi Mami Rosita*.

TORTILLA GIRLS



slinking into our kitchen past sheer curtains of
the divide, sunning in fluorescent lights
i crawl with my legs tucked
to a round table mama calls ours

every morning she stands at the stove
striking turquoise glittering on hands neck skin

a lit cigarette hanging
burning its way down till the tip
curls up towards the mouth sucking

smile lines of her face
wrinkles that echo
upon the faces of her legacies

in front her eyes wonder of happiness, behind
are dreams of dead animals and children that torment

creased hands knead dough inside and around
her bolas placed underneath blue towels to rise
skillfully as she had done

i stand at the stove where she fed her children
kneading the dough one two three bolas
rolled out to consume

salty on the tongue, licking around mouths of butter

SACA TU LENGUA MI SERPIENTE

Up behind her head extends out my skin, wrinkled and shining
Imbedded gleams reside
Threw a rock and it landed at her feet
Guadalupanos, a platoon of people marching with
Ángel swingin' the banner de rosas, libertad y soledad
Coatlicue with a thin veneer,
Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe
Perched we rock for she is mine
On stars of azul y oro
Eyes out over the top stark
Gazing on back, for an abuelas love is fertile
Fertility fertilidad
Bloodless blade to the right, to the left
Across her lap skin sits scaly and detached ready to slither on down the page
Right into my open arms

MY GREAT-GRANDMOTHER WASN'T AFRAID OF THE CHUPACABRA
TATIANA FIGUEROA RAMIREZ

“We walked on the sidewalk. Stepping
over root cracks & ignoring random cats under cars.
The moon the only light next to overworked street lamps.
Above us tree branches closed in & shook
leaves to the ground. Goyo hurried his pace, leaving
me behind to avoid the chupacabra.”

“Mami Tita, did you see
the chupacabra?”

“Claro que sí. Y era más feo.
Peor que the iguanas from Lajas
& the monkeys from Isla de Mona.”

“& what did it do?
What did you do?
Did you scream?
Did you run?
Did you - ”

“You know what I did
Lo mismo que hago con un perro.
I took my purse & swung
it in the air, howling & hissing
until the chupacabra crouched
back into darkness.”

“You weren’t afraid?”

“¿Pa’ qué tener miedo? I know
I’m stronger.”

Mami Tita’s words
sure & bullying
toward my bisabuelo
& his voiceless cowardice.
May his soul rest in peace.
A war veteran intimidated
by the breathing night.

My eyes bigger than
Arecibo’s satellite & El Yunque
combined. Mouth open, waiting.

My questions forced
thick, rust water mixed
with yucca, pumpkin, corn,
& batata to boil over
silver coin calderos.
My great-grandmother shuffled
to her square kitchen, stirring
Sancocho

She continued...

She kept stirring
& I kept watching.

I asked, knowing.

She tapped
the cucharón three times
& turned off the stove.

DANIELLA SPENCER

DORITA

She always had a way of inspiring me,

Always telling me

A man can never control me

Nor define who I am as a woman

But then she'd never fail

To remind me that

A man would never want a hoe,

As a wife

Even if he said numbers of partners

Don't matter

Although you'd contradict yourself

You'd never let me be subpar

You believe I am going to make a difference

In the world

Or maybe just in your heart

Recognizing that men aren't shit

And as women we are more,

More than just housewives

Your love and kind words

Mixed with outdated thoughts

Have created the person I am now

Rebellious and conservative

You made them one in the same

PART II

PATRIA



"A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF MY TRIP BACK TO COLOMBIA THIS PAST SUMMER, MY FIRST TIME BACK IN OVER 10 YEARS. TO BE A MUJERISTA TO ME MEANS TO EXPLORE YOUR CULTURE AND LOVE YOUR PATRIA."



AMY SOPHIA PINILLA

Mexicans in America

A photo series documenting migrant stories from undocumented people in Jackson Heights, Queens and Brooklyn, New York.

Carolina is from Izucar de Matamoros, Mexico and she has lived in the United States for more than 20 years. She arrived here through what most immigrants call, a coyote, a human smuggler migrants pay to get across the border. There are always risks when traveling with a coyote, ranging from getting caught by border patrol to coyotes who take advantage of migrants to even death.

Carolina had family members waiting for her across the border, and once she settled in the U.S., she was able to obtain a baby-sitting job. “Antes era fácil ahorrar dinero y ayudar a mi mamá y mi papá, pero ahora cuando trabajas, el dinero solo dura un día,” Carolina said.



Jorge is from Mexico City and he also migrated through a coyote, except he was alone and didn't know anyone on the other side of the border. Jorge has been living in the United States for 21 years, has 2 Mexican-American children, and is currently a concrete contractor. He is proud to have a successful life with his kids, and have a home to raise them in.

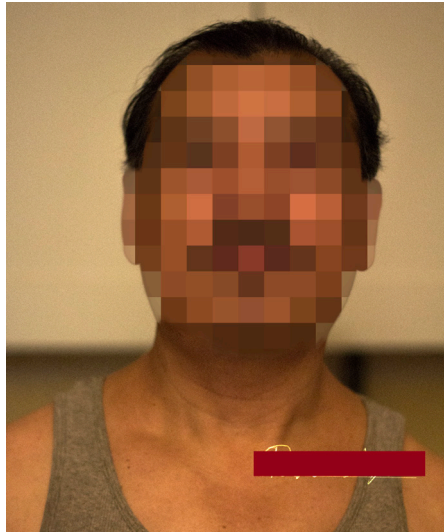


Gregoria
Tanya Leyva
Jackson Heights, Queens, New York



Jorge
Tanya Leyva
Brooklyn, New York

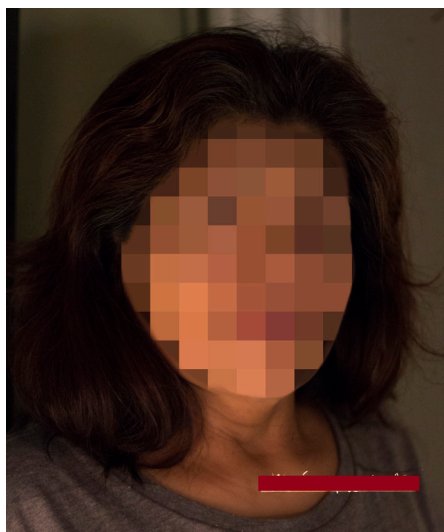
Pedro
Tanya Leyva
Brooklyn, New York



Carolina
Tanya Leyva
Brooklyn, New York



Miguel
Tanya Leyva
Jackson Heights, Queens, New York



Maria
Tanya Leyva
Brooklyn, New York



UNVEILING O RENACIMIENTO
PAOLA DE LA CALLE
RELIEF LINOCUT PRINT

ashley sanchez-garcia

eternal

my women
are powerful.

my women
learned to hold their tongues
brown bodies,
golden.

she holds
the key to the universe.
she told me when I was younger
“see what women have to live
through?”

my women,
eternal girls-

young budding roses caught in the
rain,
speaking to themselves.
comforting.

a light too bright to behold
she said
“preciosa, don’t forget where you
came from.”
“nunca.”

my women are loud
when they are alone-
dancing in the kitchen,
almost starting fires.

my women
make the best food I have ever tasted.

one lazy afternoon, Mama tells me,
“play the music from El Salvador”
I know exactly what to play.

my women fled.

my women-
they do not see themselves

in the comic relief, in the thugs,
in the blue skin white hair pale iris
on television.

mama-she noticed that she
got less popcorn
than the two white men behind her.

my women breathe in blue and
exhale red,
fingers yellow with rice flour
feet walking purple
arms dusted with orange
like the spices my grandmother
packs.

my women
pink when they reach out to each
other
and green when they speak.

my women
they apply eyeliner and lipstick
with precision
arming themselves with maquillaje
“quiero ver presentable.”

nobody told my women
they were children of the sun too
these celestial beings-
nobody told them
their noses were royal things,
or their hair was beautiful,
dark and glamorous.

pale mouth struggling to form
broken words from
that native tongue of ours
“sorry, pero mi español no es muy
bien”
she responded “I can speak
English”
exuding that deep purple I love.

I want to be purple too.
clothed in woven rainbows
like my women were
once.

my women
are royal things.
precious.

I carry their stories
in my veins.
I am a collection
of livelihoods,
scattered across the globe,
reaching to the stars and back.

I am change.
us women,
workers of light-
we bloom time and time again.
sometimes we are obscured in
darkness,
but we will always find a way
to radiate light.



PAÍS DE LA ETERNA PRIMAVERA
DARLING ALVIA
2018

Darling Alvia

We Are

We are mothers grasping to rosaries.

A little prayer for our city.

Arroz con leche para el corazón roto.

Hood talk with a soft spot for social justice.

Merengue en la mañana blaring out
the neighbors' window.

Sundays on Corona Ave.,

Sunset Park, and Spanish Harlem.

Our roots beneath its concrete.

Fighting gentrification from front lines.

Calls on año viejo to abuelita - bendiciones y besos.

“Text me when you’re en la casa”

Sopa de caldo remedy for any cold.

The love and warmth of ponche.

Stories from the countries we will always call home.

We are resistance like the dialects they can’t take, the home
cooked meals, y la revolución.



PART III

MUJERISTA

Illustration by Ariana Ortiz

EULOGY FOR THE MAIDS
AMY BRAVO
RECLAIMED OBJECTS
SCULPTURE, 2017





TORTILLERA
 AMY BRAVO
 ACRYLIC, OIL PASTEL AND
 COLLAGE ON CARDBOARD
 2017

KRYSTAL FLORES

UN RÍO BRAVO

by Stephanie Aliaga

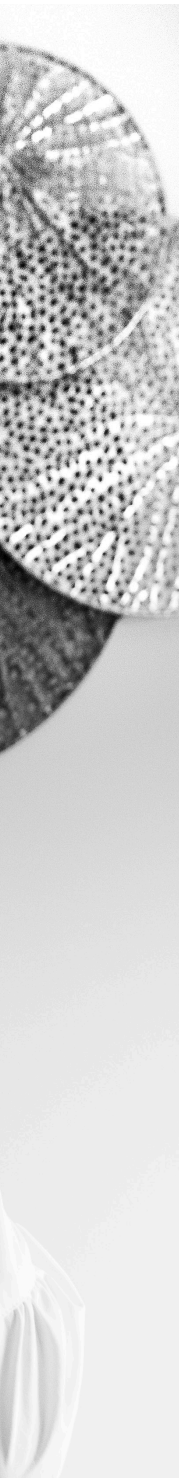
Brentwood, NY, 1980-1990s - Both sides of my family from Colombia and Peru migrated to a small town called Brentwood, Long Island. My mother used to work in a local health department as an outreach worker, working with patients who were mostly undocumented living in Suffolk County, which was once a sanctuary for Central American refugees in 1986. Growing up, I saw my mother independently participate in grassroots work with her patients, ranging from translating to informing them on their rights to helping women leave abusive relationships.

I always remembered one of my mother's most memorable patients, someone fearless of crossing borders, defending her rights, and being unapologetically Trans – who is this woman? My mother invited her to our home where she shared how her life took an unexpected turn, which led her to an eleven-year long and dangerous migrant journey from Guatemala to



Mexico as a sex worker, and ultimately crossing the U.S. border by foot. Her name is *Krystal Flores*.

Retalhuleu, Guatemala, 1981 – Krystal was born as Willy Flores and by the age of eight, she knew she wanted to be a woman and was attracted to men. When I asked her if she ever wanted to do a full transition, she tells me she doesn't want to change, because it is not natural. Meaning,



God made her in her own image, and God knows that there is femininity and masculinity in each person. Therefore, it wouldn't change how she feels about herself. It's safe to say she is fortunate to have a family who is supportive of her gender identity, considering the Northern Triangle of Central America is one of the most violent regions in the world with high rates of sexual and gender-based violence.

Krystal's father abandoned the family when she was seven-years old, and the following year the children were the breadwinners in the household. Her mother suffered from a severe cough from a prior parental beating and consequently prevented her from working. As a result, Krystal quit elementary school to sell foods like chiles rellenos, enchiladas, and pastilles on the street with her five brothers. "A veces no vendíamos nada y mi mamá se ponía tan enojada porque no podíamos pagar la renta," Krystal tells me.

Salamá, Guatemala, 1994 – At 13 years old, Krystal spontaneously bought a one-way bus ticket to the capital, Salamá, 100 miles away from home, on a mission to find work and help her family escape poverty. After explaining her situation to pimps she met on the bus, she soon learned the only opportunity available was prostitution. That same night, they dressed her up and took the young girl out onto the streets. In the next four years, Krystal was table dancing, occasionally prostituting, and

earning roughly \$300 a night. She visited her family once a year, and told her mother she was a waitress in a cantina. Whether her mom believed it or not, it paid the bills.

When Krystal permanently moved back home and returned to earning little to nothing, she began reminiscing her old lifestyle. She seized the opportunity when her friend, Elianny, shared her plans on traveling to Mexico to make more money as a prostitute. Krystal said farewell to Guatemala and without knowing, said goodbye to her mother for the last time.

Veracruz, Mexico, 2004 – The girls left to Mexico with no substantial plan except to make money, which they did while jumping to different cities and working as table dancers in southern Mexico for six years. When they arrived to Veracruz and felt unsafe to work the streets, Elianny suggested to go to Tijuana to earn American dollars, or to cross over. However, they couldn't afford bus tickets and this became a turning point for them to hitchhike from Veracruz to hopefully a border city because heading North was the only direction that seemed prosperous. Despite the dangers they faced during their one-day, non-stop hitchhike journey, their street smart skills enabled them to fool Mexican police with their fake Mexican accents during stop-and-frisks, and escape a black market where they were almost kidnapped and sold to sex trafficking.

“Voy a donde Dios me quiere.

Me voy a los Estados Unidos.”

Monterrey, Mexico, 2005 – The girls were staying at an Immigrant House, a shelter for migrants at a low cost or what Krystal described as, “a jail” for ten days. While Elianny was fancying another migrant there, Krystal was busy scrambling for a new plan and money. She calls her brother, “Por favor no le digas a mamá, pero necesito dos mil pesos. Pide el dinero prestado y me lo mandas a mi direccion lo mas pronto posible.” When suddenly, Krystal’s mother frantically interrupts the phone call saying, “¿Dónde estás? ¿Por qué estás pidiendo dinero?”

In a calm and confident voice, Krystal answers, “Voy a donde Dios me quiere. Me voy a los Estados Unidos.” Her mother began crying on the other side of the line. “No llores porque no estoy muriendo. Estoy buscando una vida mejor por ustedes y mi. Actúa como si nada iba a pasar porque yo voy a vivir.” Later that day, the money was delivered and the girls were back on the road.

Nuevo Laredo, U.S. and Mexico, 2005 – Krystal’s black high-heel boots dug into the dirt as she attempted to cross the U.S. and Mexico natural barrier, Rio Grande, but she would have to try again another day. The currents were too dangerous to swim in and Krystal explains to me the river’s surface looks calm, but underneath the current is rough, hence the nickname “Río Bravo” which translates to “rough/angry.”

With no place to go, the girls break into an abandoned

house, but it ends up getting raided by a group of gang members. They were pointing a pistol gun at Krystal, demanding money even though she insisted she had nothing to give. However, when they went through her bag they found \$20 she had forgotten about, and they slapped her across the face. One of them turned to Elianny saying, “Miras y te mato,” and then the gang left. On that windy night, the girls slept on the roof, fearing for their lives.

Río Bravo, 2005 – On their way to the Río Bravo, the girls crossed paths with the same group of gang members, but this time they had machetes and wanted Krystal and Elianny to pay with sex. Miraculously, migrants wearing watches walked pass the scene and the gang’s target shifted. Before the gang took off, they left behind an eleven-year-old boy that they might’ve kidnapped, to stay with the girls.

Krystal does not recall the little boy’s name but he taught the girls how to cross the river, even though the water was up to the his throat. Once they arrived on American soil, they were wet, cold and in pain. Elianny was suffering from a bad fever due to a cactus injury after crossing over. As they were struggling to walk another block, ICE and its helicopters appear and a agent yells, “Chinga de madre, no vas a ninguna parte!”

The boy took off, but Elianny was too sick to run. Sacrifices had to be made and at that moment, Krystal tells her, “Lo siento pero el pacto termina ahora.” When the coast was clear, Krystal ran towards a nearby town where along the way she ran into the boy and then American coyotes.

They offered to take them to their families in Texas for \$1,000 each, but they weren't interested.

Krystal and the boy found themselves kidnapped, stuffed in the back of the car, and struggling to breathe for an hour. When they stopped for gas, Krystal believes one of the coyotes disagreed with how the situation was being handled, and that's why she purposely unlocked the car to set them free. Krystal and the boy ran away, and found a local church to spend the night in.

Houston, Texas, 2005 – That morning, Krystal was so happy to shower, get medicine for her feet's inflammation, and to know she was seeing her cousin in New York soon. Her cousin sent her \$1,500 to pay for American coyotes to take her to New York, and the little boy decided to stay at the church in Texas.

It was after midnight when the coyotes picked Krystal up in a van filled with migrants waiting to be dropped off in different states. The migrants shared their journeys with each other during the commute and by the next day, Krystal was in Brentwood.

La lucha de Krystal sigue...

Brentwood, New York, 2018 – Krystal Flores, now in her mustard high-heel boots, dressed in all black, sits before me in my living room. She is thirty-nine years old and living alone in a small garage converted into a one-bedroom apartment. She is still working at her first job in America, a factory where she is discriminated and sexually harassed on a daily basis from four male

colleagues. When Krystal first reported to her boss about their transphobic comments, he suggested she wear a hat and baggy clothes to hide her body. On the contrary, her boss rewarded Krystal for her seven-years of hard work and gave her promotion. This made the men very upset and jealous, and their bullying progressed into physical inappropriate touching and saying hurtful things like, "Vas a morir de AIDS." To this day, Krystal continues to report the ongoing abuse to management, yet no progress has been made and the four men still work there.

Last year, Krystal bought a house for her family to live in Guatemala, however she is the only sibling who supports her mom. Two years ago, gang members murdered her brother who was a drug user, and the oldest brother left home at seventeen years old to live on the streets. The third brother has a drinking problem, and the youngest one only makes enough to support his two kids. "Mis hermanos no hacen nada para ayudar a mamá. Tienen problemas y se olvidan de nuestra mamá," says Krystal.

Krystal is part of the Central American Refugee Center, an organization that provides legal assistance to immigrant communities in Long Island. They are currently helping Krystal gain citizenship, and legally change her name from Willy to Krystal. The organization's support showed Krystal she does not have to be silent about her story because she is not alone. When I asked Krystal my final question, "¿Cuáles son tus sueños para el futuro?," she confessed, "Tengo muchos sueños, pero mi sueño más grande se cumplió cuando llegué aquí."



AMOR IGUAL
MARIA DEL PILAR LOPEZ
PROJECTION, AUDIO. 2017.

**UN PELO NEGRO
UNA CARA MORENA
UNA FRENTE MORENA
DOS CEJAS NEGRAS
DOS OJOS NEGROS
DOS MEJILLAS MORENAS
DOS OREJAS MORENAS
UNA NARIZ MORENA
UNA BOCA MORENA
DOS LABIOS MORENOS
UN MENTÓN MORENO
UNA BARBILLA MORENA
UNA QUIJADA MORENA
UN CUELLO MORENO
UNA CLAVÍCULA MORENA
UN PECHO MORENO
UN TORSO MORENO
DOS PEZONES MORENOS
UNA ESPALDA MORENA
DOS HOMBROS MORENOS
DOS BRAZOS MORENOS
DOS CODOS MORENOS
DOS ANTEBRAZOS MORENOS
DOS MUÑECAS MORENAS
DOS MANOS MORENAS
DIEZ DEDOS MORENOS
UN ESTÓMAGO MORENO
DOS CADERAS MORENAS
DOS PIERNAS MORENAS
DOS MUSLOS MORENOS
DOS RODILLAS MORENAS
DOS ESPINILLAS MORENAS
DOS TOBILLOS MORENOS
DOS PIES MORENOS
DIEZ DEDOS MORENOS
UN ALMA MORENA**

MORENX
MARIA DEL PILAR LOPEZ
2017

ABANDONING BEAUTY

ARIANA ORTIZ

Is it any wonder why we, as women of color, feel so alienated from our bodies?

From the time we are born, we are inundated with ideas of what womanhood is—what women are expected to look like and what personality traits to embody. Our experiences under white supremacist patriarchy—varied in themselves—differ from those of men of color and white women. Our racialization and class designations of ‘woman’ are inextricable from each other, melding into how we are perceived and therefore move through the world. They cannot be dissected individually to understand the nature of our oppression. The same can be said for those of us who are also disabled, transgender, and poor—identities that, by no coincidence, often intersect.

Black and brown women who grew up in the U.S. can easily recite what the ideal woman’s body looks like: white and thin. I have spoken with other women of color, other Latinas of mestiza and African descent, over our feelings of intense anxiety and worthlessness throughout childhood, and a painful yearning to look like their white peers or white celebrities on magazine covers and billboards. Much of this unnameable pain comes from the racialization of our bodies, which we can feel trapped in.

Many women of color are becoming increasingly aware that they have been strategically conditioned to hate themselves and their bodies from birth. These women aspire to free themselves from the self-hatred they have been brainwashed into by engaging in and promoting the body positivity movement, an idea that has been gaining traction throughout the past decade rather than a single, organized movement.

Body positivity generally calls for the acceptance of all bodies as beautiful and worthy, regardless of their adherence to conventional beauty standards. But like feminism, it has faced criticism for excluding women of color, especially Black and Indigenous women. What many white women do not understand is that when groups speak of beauty as part of a patriarchal framework, and its harmful chokehold on women’s lives, they exclude women of color by not centering them in the conversation. This is because of a clear disconnect between what “conventional beauty standards”—a vague, nebulous term—entails: whiteness and thinness.

It is necessary to conduct a historical analysis of beauty, how white supremacy itself, chattel slavery, and colonization has formed and impacted it. Another criticism facing it is its co-opting by corporate giants such as Dove, another issue that faces feminism. It has been well-documented that revolutionary movements lose traction as agents of the status quo appropriate and water them down (see: the bevy of “feminist” merchandise, made in sweatshops, being peddled to the growing number of women who identify as feminists, and the rampant rise of liberal/choice/corporate feminism).

But for me, there is a more foundational problem with the body positivity movement: it is still assigning worth to women of color based on their bodies. Rather than expanding the definition of beauty to include us, shouldn't we be dismantling the beauty/ugly dichotomy itself? Rather than trying to convince ourselves that we are beautiful and therefore worthy, isn't it more useful to forsake beauty itself, to know that beauty does not equate to worth, and to acknowledge it as the tool of oppression it is? Portraying beauty as some inclusive, positive, and even liberating idea is akin to swiping a new coat of paint onto a decrepit building: it will not hide its rotten, infested foundation.

As Audre Lorde famously wrote in her essay “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”, “For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master’s house as their only source of support.”

When we discuss *mujerismo* and learning to love ourselves and our bodies, we should not be working within a white supremacist framework to do so. But where does that leave us when it comes to battling the feelings of shame and inadequacy about our bodies? The healing begins with abandoning beauty and the illusion that it can do good for us. But I’m not speaking of embracing ugliness; ugliness is something that cannot exist without beauty, a label meant to humiliate those of us who fall outside white supremacist beauty standards. Proudly calling ourselves ugly is not the revolutionary act it may seem to be, as this is already what we are designated as under white supremacy. We must actively reject these concepts and not allow others to apply them to our bodies. Taking back our bodies has less to do with expanding a racist definition so that we may fit into it, but by establishing our own spaces and frameworks.

Relaxer

I sit in the chair as I watch her and my mom speak of the most recent news and drama
Both of them with long straight hair
Others sitting under the hairdryer
Others getting their scalps heated and pulled for straighter tresses
Me, waiting for them to pour that sickly substance to get rid of my pelo malo
As the chemical simmers on my scalp
No more frizzy hair
No more tangles
No more kinks and coils
I'll spend my weekends under the dryer burning my scalp
I'll spend my Fridays at the hair salon with all the other girls who pay the 90 pesos
I'll keep my hair wrapped during the week so the wet heat doesn't ruin it
And repeat
And repeat
Now I have nice hair like mami
Now I have good hair like tia
Now I look like everyone else
Now it's easier to do my hair
Now I am pretty
Now I am a big girl
Now I am a woman

Reza Moreno

Womanhood

The scissors go

chop
 chop
 chop

Chopping away
each strand
each caramel-colored thread
attached to my body,
I once tied with my womanhood.

A long time before,
my ancestors carried the same
long, thick, luscious,
dark colored locks
as crowns.

chop
 chop
 chop

Chopping away
force-fed
beauty standards and insecurities.

As I shed remnants of me,
the woman in the mirror is
self-liberated,
detached to it all-
but me.

How Can I, is an ongoing series born from the artist's relationship with her opinionated, Cuban grandmother who was deep in the world of cosmetology and incessantly prodding the artist with how to attain ideal, physical beauty.

Will I ever fit in?
Angie Victoria Garcia
2018





Is there a facemask for sadness?
Angie Victoria Garcia
2018

¿MUJER?

La sociedad piensa que por el hecho de haber nacido mujer estamos condenadas a vivir como sumisas del hombre, piensan que porque nos dejamos llevar por nuestras emociones no somos capaces de ser grandes líderes. Lo que los hombres no saben es que nuestros “defectos” son precisamente nuestras virtudes más grandes. Son nuestras emociones las que nos permite tomar decisiones inteligentes, apropiadas, y compasivas. Es nuestra habilidad de detectar detalles la que nos permite vivir con esperanza. Ser mujer no es fácil, pero tampoco imposible. Ser mujer es ser líder, madre, y un ejemplo a seguir. Es hora de que escribamos nuestras propias narraciones y nos convertimos en los líderes que los hombres temen. Yo soy Mujer.

Ericka Carias



BLESSED WITH BEAUTY (...AND RAGE).

CHELSEA RAMIREZ

CHARCOAL, ACRYLIC, AND COLLAGE ON PAPER MOUNTED ONTO PANEL

20" x 17" x 2"

2018



NI PUTA NI SANTA
ZORAIDA PALENCIA
2018



IN THE CLOUDS
JESSICA GARCIA



"I OFTEN WONDER WHY THE WHOLE SELF-LOVE THINGS IS BEING TALKED ABOUT ALL OVER RIGHT NOW, AND WHY ARE NOW SEARCHING FOR SELF-LOVE, IF IT IS WITHIN US?"



"AS A MOTHER OF A YOUNG GIRL, THE STRENGTH, POWER, AND PASSION I FEEL INSIDE OF MYSELF HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED. I AM PROUD OF TO BE HER MOTHER; AS THE WOMAN I WAS, I AM AND WILL BE"

MARIELA FELIZ FERNANDEZ
SELF-LOVE
2018

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mujeristascollective.com/blog**

**UPCOMING
ISSUE IV SPRING 2019**

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